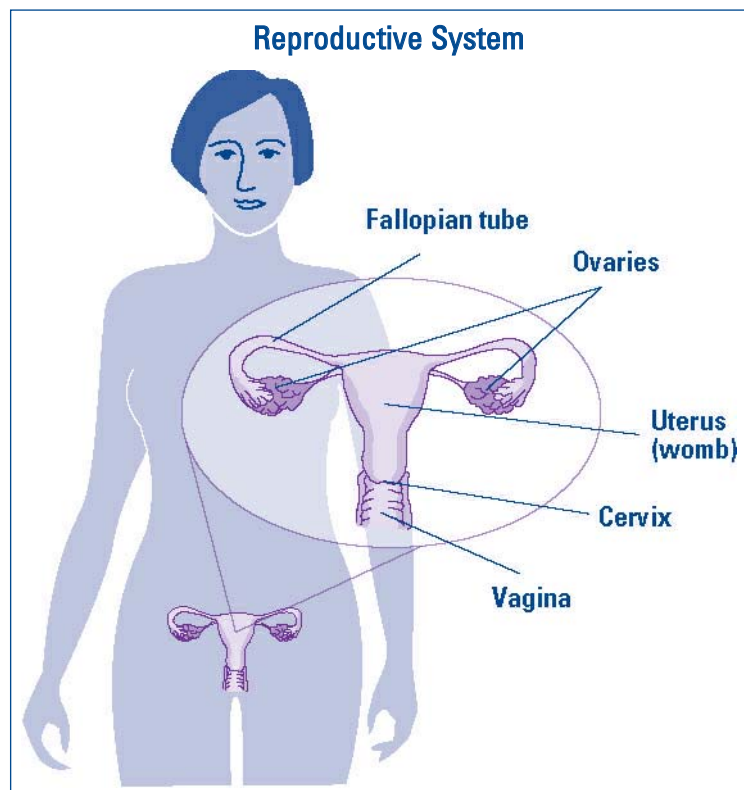


A Guide to Problems in Your Uterus

The uterus is the hollow, pear-shaped organ in a woman's body where a baby grows. This is also where menstruation—getting your period—begins each month. The lower end of the uterus, or cervix, extends into the vagina. The upper part is the “body” of the uterus. The body of the uterus has two layers: an inner and an outer layer. The endometrium is the inner layer. During the menstrual cycle, or “period,” this layer builds up extra blood and tissue to get ready for pregnancy. If a pregnancy doesn't happen, the extra blood and tissue leave the body through the vagina. This is your period. The myometrium is the outer layer of the body of the uterus. This layer has the muscle that pushes the baby out during delivery. You may have had times in your life when you've had pain in your lower abdomen or bleeding that was different from your normal period. These

symptoms can make you nervous and wonder if something is wrong. Knowing about the different health problems that can affect your uterus and their symptoms can help you know when to see your doctor. Be sure to see your doctor if you think you have any problems.



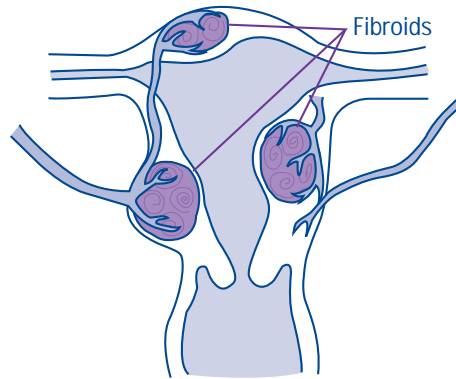
Problems in Your Uterus

Fast Facts on Fibroids

What they are

Growths within the wall of the uterus (or womb)

Uterine Fibroids



What they look like

Fibroids can grow as a single growth or in groups. Their size can vary from small, like an apple seed, to even larger than a grapefruit.

Cause

No one knows exactly what causes fibroids. Fibroids often run in families.

Symptoms

Most fibroids do not cause any symptoms. If they do cause symptoms, they are:

- heavy bleeding or painful periods
- spotting or bleeding between periods
- feeling of fullness in the pelvic area (lower abdomen)
- urinating often
- pain during sex
- lower back pain
- reproductive problems like not being able to get pregnant, having more than one miscarriage, or having early onset of labor during pregnancy

Tests

- regular pelvic exam
 - tests that create a “picture” of the inside of your body to see if you have fibroids (ultrasound)
 - laparoscopy—surgery when your doctor places a small tube with a light inside your abdomen to see any fibroids
 - hysteroscopy—surgery when your doctor inserts a long tube with a camera into the vagina and directly into the uterus to see any fibroids
-

Treatment

- pain medicine
 - drugs to decrease the size of the fibroids or that stop or slow the growth of fibroids
 - surgery
 - shrinking the fibroids by placing a freezing agent on them
 - cutting off the blood supply to the uterus and the fibroids so they shrink (uterine artery embolization)
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Does it cause cancer?

Although fibroids are sometimes called tumors, they are almost always NOT cancerous.

Fast Facts on Endometriosis

What it is

Each month, tissue normally builds up in the uterus and is shed as your monthly period. Endometriosis occurs when this tissue grows outside of the uterus.

What it looks like

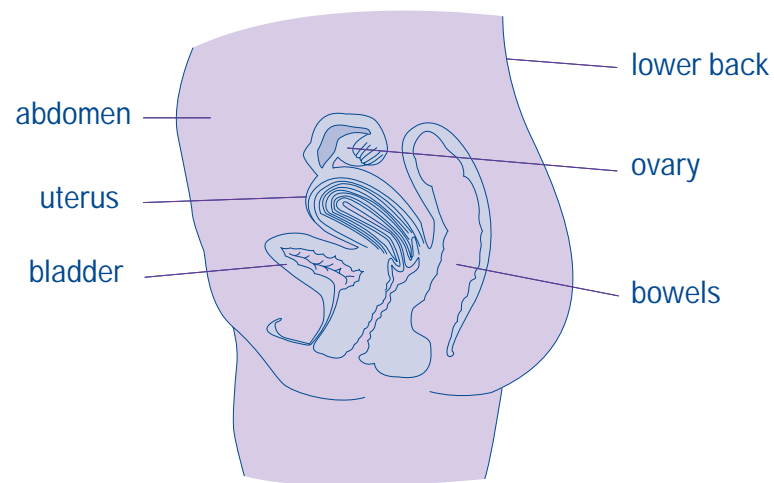
Bumps, scars, fluid-filled sacs called cysts.

Cause

No one knows exactly what causes endometriosis.

Where it grows

It mostly grows in the abdomen, lower back, and pelvic areas (ovaries, bowels or bladder, behind the uterus, tissues that hold the uterus in place). Outside of the uterus, it's still shed, but hurts the tissues and can damage your organs.



Symptoms

- very painful cramps or periods
 - heavy periods
 - chronic pelvic pain
 - spotting or bleeding between periods
 - lower back pain
 - intestinal pain
 - pain during or after sex
 - can't get pregnant
 - painful bowel movements (BM) or pain passing urine during your period
 - tiredness
 - stomach problems
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Tests

- medical history
 - pelvic exam
 - physical exam
 - tests that create a “picture” of the inside of your body (ultrasound)
 - laparoscopy—surgery when your doctor places a small tube with a light inside your abdomen to see if there’s endometriosis
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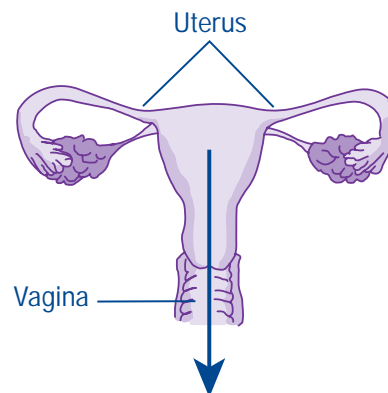
Treatment

- pain medicine
 - hormone therapy
 - surgery
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Fast Facts on Uterine Prolapse

What it is

The uterus slips from its normal position into the vaginal canal.



Causes

The tissues and muscles that hold up the uterus weaken. It can happen:

- after one or more vaginal births
- after delivery of a large baby (more than 9 pounds)
- after hard labor and delivery
- with normal aging
- with reduction in estrogen

Obesity and chronic coughing or straining can also weaken the muscles and raise a woman’s chances of having this condition.

Continued from Fast Facts on Uterine Prolapse

Symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• feeling of heaviness or pulling in the pelvis• a feeling like you're sitting on a small ball• painful sex• low back pain• feeling an urgent need to urinate• leaking urine• painful bowel movements (BM)• constipation
Test	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• pelvic exam
Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• inserting an object into the vagina to hold the uterus in place• surgery• Kegel exercises (squeezing your pelvic muscles like you're trying to stop the flow of urine)• estrogen therapy

Fast Facts on Cancer of the Uterus

What it is	There are two kinds of cancer of the uterus: <i>endometrial cancer</i> (cancer of the lining of the uterus) and <i>uterine cancer</i> (cancer of the muscle of the uterus). Endometrial cancer is a common kind of cancer in women, whereas uterine cancer is more rare.
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**In the United States,
cancer of the endometrium
is the most common
cancer found in women's
reproductive organs.**

Cause	We don't know what causes endometrial cancer. Women have a higher chance of getting it if they: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• have been treated with tamoxifen for breast cancer• started their periods before age 12
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| Cause (continued) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• start menopause after age 50• have heavy bleeding during perimenopause, the time leading up to menopause• are obese• have a family history of colon cancer• have never been pregnant• have taken estrogen, without progestin, for menopausal symptoms• have polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS)• have a high-fat diet• have diabetes• are age 40 or older• had breast or ovarian cancer• had prior radiation therapy to the pelvic area |
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| Symptoms (endometrial cancer) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• abnormal bleeding or discharge not related to your periods• difficulty or pain passing urine• pain during sex• pain in your pelvis• weight loss |
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| Tests (endometrial cancer) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• medical history• physical exam• pelvic exam• biopsy—removal of tissue from the endometrium (inner lining of the uterus)• D&C (dilation and curettage) or removal of tissue• x-ray• tests that create a “picture” of the inside of your body (ultrasound)• blood tests |
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| Treatment (endometrial cancer) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• surgery• chemotherapy• radiation therapy• hormone therapy |
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Hysterectomy

A hysterectomy is a treatment used to take out the uterus. Sometimes, other organs are removed too. Listed below are the different types.

- A *complete* or *total hysterectomy* removes the cervix and uterus. This is the most common type of hysterectomy.
- A *partial* or *subtotal hysterectomy* removes the upper part of the uterus but leaves the cervix.
- A *radical hysterectomy* removes the uterus, cervix, upper part of the vagina, and supporting tissues.
- A *bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy* removes both ovaries and fallopian tubes during a hysterectomy.

A hysterectomy will stop a woman's periods if she hasn't reached menopause yet. If the ovaries are removed before a woman reaches menopause, she will suddenly enter menopause.

Do What You Can to Prevent Problems in Your Uterus

- Get regular pelvic exams and Pap tests. Talk with your doctor or nurse about how often you need them. *See the screening charts on page 16 for more information.*
- Consider a human papillomavirus (HPV) test. HPV is the virus that can cause cervical cancer.

- Prevent STDs including HIV by practicing safer sex. *See the chapter on page 88 for more information about STDs and safer sex.*
- See your doctor if you have abnormal bleeding or discharge, pain during sex, pain in your pelvic area, or pain during urination.

Then and Now

Between 1938 and 1971, U.S. doctors gave pregnant women a drug called DES to prevent miscarriages and other pregnancy problems. During that time, doctors didn't know these mothers and their daughters would suffer serious health problems from this drug. Many of these problems affected a woman's uterus and put their daughters at a higher risk for a rare type of cervical cancer, infertility, and damage to their reproductive organs. For example, DES can cause the uterus to develop into a "T" shape instead of its normal shape in the daughters.



Normal uterus



"T" shaped uterus